

# The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

## Chapter 1: Introduction

[Brian Schwertley](#)

The Sermon on the Mount (the first and lengthiest of the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew) is one of the most rich and interesting, yet misunderstood, sections of sacred Scripture. This sermon is one of the most studied, quoted, yet also ignored, chapters of God's Word. "The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best-known part of the teaching of Jesus, thought arguably it is the least understood, and certainly it is the least obeyed."<sup>1</sup> The Savior's sermon is crucial—for it is one of the lengthiest, most complete expositions of what Christ expects from His disciples in their attitudes, behavior and service to God. In our day of "easy-believism" or antinomianism, the church growth movement (i.e. the idea of making the church grow by making it more like the world), the prosperity gospel (i.e. the teaching that Jesus came so we could be wealthy, healthy, happy and full of self-esteem), the emergent church movement (e.g., postmodernism applied to the church), Charismatic mysticism and existentialism and widespread nominalism (i.e. Christianity applies to church on Sunday and not much else spiritually or ethically), the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is as needed and relevant as ever.

### Interpretive Considerations

Before we begin our exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, it will be helpful to spend some time looking at issues that will help in understanding how to approach and interpret this marvelous section of Scripture. There are a number of areas to consider.

First, there is the issue of audience. To whom is the sermon directed? This point is actually quite important, for humanists, unbelievers and modernists are very fond of quoting bits and pieces of this sermon out of context and applying them to anyone and everyone. Thus, the phrase "turn the other cheek" is used by many on the left for pacifism and "do not judge" is used as a proof text against condemning homosexuality. Although multitudes of people were on the Mount and heard this sermon, our Lord's teaching is directed primarily to disciples or believers: "And when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them saying..." (Mt. 5:1-2). Luke's version, "the sermon on a level place," says, "Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples and said..." (6:20). This point is also obvious from the description of those who are blessed (Mt. 5:3-11); the ethical contrast between those who follow Christ and pagans (Mt. 6:7-8, 32), as well as religious hypocrites (Mt. 6:16-17); the many references to entering or possessing the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:10, 19, 20, 6:20); the imperatives that presuppose a commitment to Christ (e.g., Mt. 5:14, 16, 23, 44, 45, 47; 6:1, 5, 7; "You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" [Mt. 5:48]) and the prayer to God as Father (Mt. 6:9f.). The father of unbelievers is not God but the devil (cf. Jn. 8:44).

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 15.

While this sermon is directed toward believers, it also was designed to inform the multitude what repentance and following Christ involved. This can be ascertained from both the immediate context and the sermon itself. In the chapter before this sermon there is the calling of the disciples (Mt. 4:19-32; Lk. 6:13-16) and an emphasis on the dramatic ministry of Jesus. The Savior was going all through Galilee “teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases among the people” (Mt. 4:23). The Redeemer was preaching, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand” (Mt. 4:17). Even at this early stage, Christ was extremely popular and famous throughout the nation: “Great multitudes followed Him from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan” (Mt. 4:25). When our Lord saw the multitudes He accommodated them by going up a mountain (Mt. 5:1). After the sermon was over, Matthew informs us that “the people were astonished at His teaching” (7:28).

Even though the content of the sermon (which deals with how believers are to think and act) is not directly addressed to people who are unbelievers; nevertheless, there is an evangelistic element to the sermon. The multitudes are hearing a contrast between true and false ethics (5:17-48); true and false piety (6:1-18); religious hypocrisy (5:13; 6:16); the necessity of entering by the narrow gate (7:13); and the deadly dangers of false teachers (7:15 ff.). Near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry He very clearly sets Himself apart from the religious establishment. When the people hear “repent and follow Me,” they now know the radical commitment that this involves. They also now know the internal aspect of God’s moral law; Pharisaical concepts of achieving salvation by keeping the law are impossible. God requires ethical perfection in thought, word and deed.

The Sermon on the Mount tells believers that they must be different. Jesus said, “Do not be like them” (Mt. 6:8). Christians are to be salt (Mt. 5:13) and light (Mt. 5:14-16) to a dark, unsaved world. “It is wrong to ask anybody who is not first a Christian to try to live or practice the Sermon on the Mount. To expect Christian conduct from a person who is not born again is heresy. The appeals of the gospel in terms of conduct and ethics and morality are always based on the assumption that the people to whom the injunctions are addressed are Christians.”<sup>2</sup> The message of the Sermon on the Mount properly understood clearly tells people that apart from God’s grace, there is no possibility of even approaching our Lord’s requirements for discipleship.

Second, what is the relationship of the Sermon on the Mount to Luke’s sermon on the plain (6:17-49)? Commentators are about equally divided on this issue. The case for the section in Luke being a completely separate sermon is put forth succinctly by John Brown:

There is indeed a strong similarity; but still there is a marked difference, both in the discourses, and in the circumstances in which they were delivered. There are many things in the sermon recorded by Matthew, not to be found in the sermon recorded by Luke, and some things in the sermon recorded by Luke, not to be found in the sermon recorded by Matthew. Statements, that at first view seem very similar, when examined, are found so different, that you cannot suppose them to be different reports of the same statement. The sermon recorded in Matthew, was delivered before the healing of the leper. The sermon recorded by Luke, seems to have been delivered after that miracle. The sermon recorded in Matthew was delivered before Matthew’s call to be a disciple. The sermon recorded in Luke was delivered after the twelve disciples were called to their particular office. The sermon in Matthew was delivered on a mountain; the sermon recorded in Luke was spoken on the plain. Instead of eight beatitudes, as

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<sup>2</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1959, 60] 1971), 1:23.

there are in the sermon recorded by Matthew, there are only four in the sermon recorded by Luke, and these not by any means of equivalent meaning with those which they most resemble. The only circumstance which appears to me a weighty one in the opposite scale is, that the account of the healing of a centurion's servant follows immediately the delivery of both discourses.<sup>3</sup>

If Luke records a completely separate occasion, then one can conclude that the message of the Sermon on the Mount was preached in slightly different forms on many different occasions.

Those scholars who believe that Matthew and Luke have recorded the same sermon make the following arguments. (1) There is no contradiction between Matthew's term "mountain" and Luke's "plain" because after Jesus chose the disciples on the mountain top He went to a level place to deliver the sermon. The phrase *topou pedinou* in Luke 6:17 simply means "a level place." Therefore, the mountain contained a plateau.<sup>4</sup> (2) The historical setting in both is very similar. Both Matthew and Luke record that the sermon was delivered after a great multitude of people followed Him all over Palestine who came to the Savior to be healed (Mt. 4:25; Lk. 6:17). Both also are followed by the healing of the centurion's servant (Mt. 8:5 ff.; Lk. 7:2ff.). (3) The outline of the sermon is the same in both: the beatitudes; Jesus teaching on the moral law; the parable of the two builders; etc. (cf. Mt. 5:3-12/Lk. 6:20-23; Mt. 5:44-48/Lk. 6:27-30, 32-36; Mt. 7:24-27/Lk. 6:47-49). The fact that Luke omits material found in Matthew's account demonstrates that each author was selecting material and editing in accordance with the purpose of each gospel which was directed to different audiences. Matthew's coverage is much more extensive because certain things such as Jesus' relationship to the Mosaic law would have been of great importance to a Jewish audience.

Whatever position one holds, it is likely that the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount were repeated to many different audiences in different locations. Further, no matter what interpretation one holds on this particular issue, it does not affect the content or exegesis of this sermon.

Third, the Sermon on the Mount was spoken at one time in one place. The narrative containing the sermon has a definite beginning and ending ("Then He opened His mouth and taught them saying.... And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching..." (Mt. 5:2; 7:28). This point is important because some commentators (usually modernists or neo-evangelicals) view the sermon as merely a literary device used to set forth a related collection of teachings and sayings.<sup>5</sup> It is argued that Matthew (or for modernists, post-apostolic church leaders) very carefully weaved together sayings of or traditions about Jesus' teaching. Even the master expositor John Calvin believed this sermon was a compilation of material. He writes, "For the design of both Evangelists was to collect into one

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<sup>3</sup> John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1850] 1990), 1:112-113.

<sup>4</sup> "The Greek word *pedinos* is commonly used with reference to a plain as opposed to a mountain (a natural opposition), but sometimes for a plain or flat valley among mountains, or a flat place on a mountain. Thus in Jer. 21:13 Jerusalem is called 'rock of the plain,' and in Isa. 13:2 we have in Sept. 'lift up a signal upon a level (flat) mountain' (*ep' orous pedinou*), Heb., 'upon a bare hill,' not covered with trees. This latter passage is obscure (see Gesen, Schleus, and commentaries on Isaiah), but either this or the use in Jeremiah seems to furnish a parallel for the use in Luke" (John A. Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Kregel (1886) 1990], 84, footnote 1).

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay writes, "We speak of the Sermon on the Mount as if it was one single sermon preached on one single occasion. But it is far more than that. There are good and compelling reasons for thinking that the Sermon on the Mount is far more than one sermon, that it is, in fact, a kind of epitome of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached" (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975], 1:84).

place the leading points of the doctrine of Christ, which related to a devout and holy life.... Pious and modest readers ought to be satisfied with having a brief summary of the doctrine of Christ placed before their eyes, collected out of his many and varied discourses, the first of which was that in which he spoke to his disciples about true happiness.”<sup>6</sup>

Although any theories that reject divine inspiration (e.g., redaction criticism) or that view the sermon as a mere literary device for a collection of material that was spoken over months or years must be rejected, it does not rule out the possibility that the Sermon on the Mount was collected from a lengthy period of teaching given *at one time*. This view makes sense in that the Sermon on the Mount would have taken only about 10 minutes to deliver. Further, the changes in the sermon are often sharp and abrupt. New topics sometimes emerge without warning. This, of course, could simply be a deliberate method of teaching on our Lord’s part.

Fourth, it is important to interpret the Sermon on the Mount within the broader context of the Bible’s teaching, or what is called the analogy of Scripture. By this approach one can avoid a crass, literal interpretation of such passages as Matthew 5:29, 30, 34. One can also avoid common mistakes. For example, Anabaptists have historically understood Matthew 5:34-37 as a complete and new prohibition on taking oaths of any kind. But passages such as Matthew 26:63-64 prove that, when used lawfully, our Lord did not object to the use of oaths. In Matthew 7:1 Jesus says, “Judge not that you be not judged” (cf. Lk. 6:37). But in John 7:24 our Lord says, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” The passage regarding turning the other cheek (Mt. 5:39; Lk. 6:29) has been used against all self-defense and warfare. Yet other passages explicitly allow self-defense under certain circumstances and what is called a just war. Everything in the Sermon on the Mount must be viewed in the whole context of Scripture before we can properly understand the particular parts.

Also, it is important to interpret all the particular statements of the Sermon on the Mount in their proper order. “The Beatitudes do not come at the end, they come at the beginning, and I do not hesitate to say that unless we are perfectly clear about them we should go no further. We have no right to go further.”<sup>7</sup> The beatitudes set the stage for the injunctions that follow. The Savior’s statement about the continuing validity of the moral law is the platform for the following contrast between a biblical ethic and the ethic of the scribes and Pharisees. The discussion of personal piety also logically follows Jesus’ discussion of the law. There is logic to our Lord’s order that must not be ignored.

Fifth, it would be wise and helpful to consider common errors in the way this sermon has been approached in the past. There have been a number of popular interpretations that are erroneous and even heretical.

One such approach is that of Christian liberals or modernists who use this sermon as a justification for what they call the “social gospel.” Because the Sermon on the Mount contained no explicit references to Christ’s atoning death, modernists who had already rejected the doctrine of vicarious atonement were drawn to its message in a perverted manner. They assumed that the Sermon on the Mount was the very centerpiece of all Christian theology and purposely ignored the New Testament’s focus on the cross of Christ. They argued that Christianity is not founded upon a bloody cross, but rather upon an ethical system. They argued that if this superior ethic was put into practice by people and communities, it would lead to the kingdom of God on earth, the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. It, they believed, was the key to peace on earth, the elimination of poverty, injustice, racism and so forth. The Sermon on the Mount

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<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 1:258-259.

<sup>7</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:23.

became a type of ethical platform for the Christian liberal's concept of postmillennialism and utopianism.

Modernists, however, have completely failed to consider the biblical teaching that, apart from the redemptive work of Christ and the new birth, men are slaves of sin, Satan and guilt; and thus cannot form any type of just society or peaceful world system. Further, from the very outset of Jesus' ministry, the suffering and sacrificial death of Christ was in the forefront. Twice, John the baptizer pointed to the Savior in front of his disciples and said "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29, 35). This statement is clearly an allusion to Isaiah's description of the suffering servant, the Passover and the altar of sacrifice. Our Lord emphasized the crucifixion as the source of eternal life when He said to Nicodemus, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:14-15). When considering the Sermon on the Mount, one must keep in mind that not every verse speaks *directly* about the cross of Christ. Sometimes there are lengthy discussions of ethical matters. However, all discussion of ethical issues must be considered in the broad context of Scripture and this context teaches us that Jesus' redemptive work is the foundation of a believer's sanctification; that obedience to ethical imperatives can only come from a vital union with the Savior in His death and resurrection. It is in this way that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount on what it means to follow the Redeemer and be a disciple in a wicked world, is rooted in, presupposes or is connected with the cross of Christ. As Matthew Henry notes, "There is not much of the credenda of Christianity in it—the things to be believed; but it is wholly taken up with the agenda—the things to be done, for 'If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine' (John vii.17)."<sup>8</sup> Modernists have proved that unbiblical, unbelieving presuppositions lead to bad exegesis and wrong conclusions. As Hendriksen notes, "It is surely a very arbitrary procedure *to accept* the Sermon on the Mount but *to reject* those sayings of the same Jesus in which he demands faith in himself as present Savior and future Judge (Matt. 16:16-20; 22:42-45; 25:31-46; John 14:1ff., etc.) and clearly teaches the doctrine of atonement by blood (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 6:53, 55; etc.). Besides, does not even the sermon itself declare the majesty of Christ? See especially 5:17; 7:21-23, 28, 29."<sup>9</sup> Those who pick and choose according to their presuppositions reveal a failure to submit to the all things that our Lord has commanded.

Another wrong approach to the Sermon on the Mount comes from classic dispensationalism. According to this view the sermon is not directed to Christians or the church of Christ (which is a parenthesis in God's plan), but rather to the Jews only and those living in the future Jewish theocratic kingdom during the coming millennium. It is argued that this sermon presupposes the doctrine of repentance, which old-style dispensationalists argue is a distinctly Jewish or legal doctrine. They argue that the dispensation of grace is unconditional and thus repentance as a requirement is contrary to the Christian faith. In support of this idea they point to the petition in the Lord's prayer which says, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Mt. 6:12). They argue that this prayer must be for the "kingdom age" and not the church because it rests upon personal obedience or a legal ground. Thus, old-fashioned dispensationalists do not use the Lord's prayer in private or public worship at all. The Scofield Reference Bible says, "Under law forgiveness is conditioned upon a like spirit in us; under grace, we are forgiven for Christ's sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven"

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, as quoted in Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1950, 53] 1982), 13.

<sup>9</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 262.

(1002). One dispensationalist author has written that “the so-called ‘Lord’s Prayer,’ is ‘a prayer that has no more place in the Christian Church than the thunders of Sinai, or the offerings of Leviticus.’”<sup>10</sup> The dispensationalist teaches that the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to do with us; therefore, it can be ignored.

Regarding this serious dispensational error we respond by noting the following. It presupposes that God has two completely separate peoples—Israel and the church—when the Bible teaches that Israel was the visible expression of the church in the Old Covenant and has been replaced or superseded by the multinational New Covenant people of God (see Gal. 5:28; 6:15-16). The middle wall of partition has been broken down and now both Jews and Gentiles are one holy temple together in the Lord (Eph. 2:19-22). It also completely misunderstands the meaning of the Lord’s prayer. “The meaning is not that if we forgive others we may expect, as a kind of *quid pro quo*, that God will forgive us. But rather the emphasis is on the fact, brought out so impressively in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mt. xviii.23f.), that those who have been forgiven much must themselves be ready to forgive. Those who harbor an unforgiving spirit toward their fellowmen show plainly that they do not realize that they themselves owe everything to the infinite compassion and forgiving mercy of God.”<sup>11</sup> Obviously, forgiving repentant brothers their sins is a fruit of saving faith and not a co-instrument or ground of justification before God. Further, virtually all the ethical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are found or supported by other portions of the New Testament. If the false doctrine of dispensationalism is used to eliminate the Sermon on the Mount, then, if consistent, it could also render irrelevant many portions of the New Testament epistles. The Sermon on the Mount was intended for Jesus’ disciples. Therefore, it also applies to Christians in the present.<sup>12</sup>

Sixth, it is important to recognize that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount applies to every Christian. The sermon is not an invitation to asceticism for spiritual elite. The message is not a form of Christian idealism that no one is really expected to follow. The teaching is not directed at only super-spiritual believers who want to take their faith to another level. Its main purpose is not simply to show the need of grace in order to drive us to Christ. The radical discipleship and commitment to personal obedience, which are the focus of this sermon, are fundamental to what it means to be a Christian. Jesus expects and demands that all believers are to live in terms of this message. The sermon is primarily concerned with sanctification. The gospel is not a relaxation of the demands of God’s holy law, but rather includes a call to manifest the characteristics of holiness internally, privately, publicly, outwardly and socially. The sermon even comes to a close with men who professed Christ being condemned to hell for living a life of hypocrisy, of antinomianism (Mt. 7:23); and, the *absolute necessity* of not only hearing but also obeying “these sayings of Mine” (Mt. 7:24-27).

Seventh, the sermon is well-organized and has three main sections. The first section runs from 5:2 to 5:16 (the beatitudes [5:3-12] and the teaching on salt and light [5:13-16]). It discusses who the citizens of the kingdom are: their character, blessedness, relationship to the world and the influence they are to have over society and culture. The second section (5:17-7:12)

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<sup>10</sup>Haldeman, *How to Study the Bible*, 140, as quoted in Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945, 47), 295.

<sup>11</sup> Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 46.

<sup>12</sup> The dispensational approach of treating the expressions “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” as referring to two different kingdoms is also unscriptural. Matthew, writing to Jews, usually avoids the term God and therefore substituted a euphemism (“heaven”) so Jews would not be offended. These expressions, however, are identical (cf. Mt. 19:23 f.; Mk. 10:23 f.; etc.). Luke, writing to Gentiles, is not so concerned about Jewish sensibilities and uses the expression “kingdom of God” (6:20).

deals with the relationship of Jesus' disciples with the moral law. Here our Lord contrasts His view of the moral law with that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus sets Himself apart from the contemporary rabbis with six antitheses (5:21-48). Then, He deals with personal piety by contrasting outward versus inward or genuine righteousness (6:1-18). In the third section of the Sermon on the Mount the Savior focuses on the necessity of choosing and following the correct way (7:13-27). He discusses the two ways before all men (7:13-14); true and false teachers (7:15-23); and good and bad foundations (7:24-27). Matthew ends this pericope by telling us the profound effect this sermon had on the hearers. The sermon, in both its structure and content, is a masterpiece. The people are not simply instructed with the truth, but the choice God requires of them is set before their eyes with sharp, terrifying imagery. Christ, in a sense, lays out the future of everyman in terms of how they will respond to His message. The people had never heard anyone teach with such authority (Mt. 7:29).

## The Setting

Matthew, writing to a predominantly Jewish audience, informs us that Jesus went up on a mountain (Gk., "the mountain") to teach. The definite article may indicate a mountain well known to His disciples. As noted, Luke indicates that this mountain had a plateau or level area suitable for teaching a large crowd. "Mountains in Matthew are clearly places where special events occur (4:8, the mountain of temptation; 17:1, the mountain of the transfiguration; 28:16, the mountain of the resurrection appearance and the great commission...)." <sup>13</sup> Mountains in Scripture are often associated with the giving of revelation (e.g., Ex. 19:3 ff.; Mt. 28:16 ff.). The fact that the Sermon on the Mount is very concerned with ethical matters and the proper view and interpretation of God's law, has led a number of scholars to compare this setting with Moses' ascent to receive the law. Many even argue that our Lord ascended the Mount to set forth a new law for the New Covenant people of God. This law, however, is not really new; but, rather, Jesus—the original lawgiver on Sinai—defends and expounds the true meaning of the moral law for His people.

This setting demonstrates the greater blessings of the New Covenant in that the original law was given in the context of earthquakes, lightning and thunder. The people were terrified and begged for a mediator so that God would not speak to them directly. Here we have the divine human Mediator, the greater than Moses, speaking directly to the people with grace and kindness. In the giving of the law at Sinai the people were not permitted to come upon the mountain upon threat of death. God's infinite holiness required a partition around the base of the mountain to protect the people from being consumed by God's wrath against sin; but, the Savior invited the people to come close to hear this teaching. Jesus removes the fence of separation and brings us safely to God. The Redeemer removes the terror of the law by His work as Mediator and then expects us to obey that same moral law for personal sanctification. "If God's grace and goodness are (as certainly they are) his glory, then the glory of the gospel is the glory that excels, for *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*, 2 Cor. iii.7; Heb. xii.18, &c." <sup>14</sup>

After a suitable place for teaching was found, Jesus was seated. Our Lord assumed the posture used at that time for teaching. Sitting was the position for rabbis and teachers who were to instruct their disciples (cf. Mt. 13:2; 23:2; 24:3; 26:55; Lk. 4:20; Jn. 8:2 etc.). "When a Jewish rabbi was teaching, officially he sat to teach. We still speak of a professor's *chair*; the Pope still

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<sup>13</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 83.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:46.

speaks *ex cathedra*, from his seat. Often a Rabbi gave instruction when he was standing or strolling about; but his really official teaching was done when he had taken his seat.”<sup>15</sup> Note that only after Christ took His seat did His disciples come and assemble themselves around Him. They understood perfectly well what His position of repose implied and hurried to get the best place possible near the Master to hear every word of His authoritative teaching. With the clear sky above Him and the hills about Him as God’s classroom, the Son of God speaks. This whole scene would have made a deep and solemn impression on His followers.

After the Redeemer was seated Matthew says, “Then He opened His mouth and taught them saying...” (5:2). “The phrase *anoizas to stoma autou*, ‘he opened his mouth’, is a Semitic idiom used at the beginning of a public address (...cf. Acts 8:35; 10:34).”<sup>16</sup> This phrase increases the importance, dignity and solemnity of the teaching that follows. The teaching is not informal, “off the cuff” remarks, but is an official solemn utterance regarding crucial issues. The solemnity and importance of this teaching is set forth by Luke’s comment, “Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples and said” (6:20). The Son of God’s eyes of concern and compassion were focused on His disciples. The eyes of God, so to speak, are directed toward those that He blesses with His grace.

When Matthew says “He taught them saying,” the verb taught (*edidasken*) is in the imperfect tense, indicating that He began to teach and His teaching continued for some time. It was a most impressive scene as Jesus opened His mouth, looked directly at the apostles and disciples; and then spoke with a loud clear voice, so the whole multitude could hear His teaching.

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<sup>15</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:86.

<sup>16</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 86.